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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 000941

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF DAS YAMAMOTO AND AF/E
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/05/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [MOPS](#) [KPKO](#) [FT](#) [ER](#)

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIAN FOREIGN MINISTER REAFFIRMS DESIRE FOR
NORMALIZATION TALKS WITH ERITREA

REF: ADDIS ABABA 897

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES VICKI HUDDLESTON. REASON: 1.4 (D).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY. Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin hailed the importance of U.S. engagement in addressing Ethiopia-Eritrea tensions, but voiced continued concern about Eritrean intentions and the presence of Eritrean troops in the Temporary Security Zone, where UNMEE had become "a hostage." FM Seyoum reaffirmed Ethiopian desire for normalization talks with Eritrea, underscoring that demarcation should be a means toward achieving sustainable peace, not an end in itself. In viewing a computer simulation of the demarcation of the border, Seyoum noted that the western portion of the border with Eritrea was not in accordance with the decision of the EEBC, and should be shifted even further west. Seyoum's comments are consistent with those of Prime Minister Meles, but more strident those of senior Ethiopian military officials. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (U) On March 30, visiting AF DAS Amb. Donald Yamamoto, AF/E desk advisor William Schofield, and INR/GGI analyst Raymond Milefsky, accompanied by Charge and poloff, met with Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin, acting Director General for the MFA's Europe and America Directorate Almaz Amha, and MFA Counsellor for Legal Affairs Minelik Alemu.

¶13. (C) Ethiopia's attendance at the March 10 meeting of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission (EEBC) in London reflected Ethiopia's appreciation for USG engagement on the border issue, FM Seyoum said. "We went to London with limited objectives, as reflected by our delegation," he said.

(NOTE: Amcit attorney Don Picard and MFA Counsellor Minelik represented the GOE. END NOTE.) "They were told... not to agree to anything, but to facilitate for our friend the United States and to show the commitment of Ethiopia," Seyoum added.

"COLD PEACE" UNDERSCORES CONTINUED SUSPICION OF ERITREA

¶14. (C) FM Seyoum expressed concern about Ethiopia conforming with the EEBC's instructions while "Eritrean guns are pointed at our head," observing, "We are (wary of) stepping into that minefield, or getting into that trap." Following the EEBC meeting, "decisions were imposed on us; we are now instructed to name our liaison officers, name our security plan," he said. (NOTE: According to UNMEE DSRSG Ennifar, Eritrea had identified liaison officers to work with the EEBC, and

submitted a security plan for demarcators, in 2004, which the GSE maintained was still in effect. As of April 1, Ethiopia had taken neither step, despite being expected to do so by March 24. END NOTE.) Ethiopia doubted Eritrea's commitment to restoring the "dignity" of the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ), where 18 posts abandoned by UNMEE were "now occupied by regular army troops." The Eritrean military now controlled the movement of UNMEE, rather than the reverse. "UNMEE is just a hostage; whether they remain in the TSZ or not, they have become part of the problem," he said. There was now "a cold peace," he said, but "we don't know how long it will remain there." Complaining that "the attitude of the other side has not changed," Seyoum indicated that Ethiopia may nominally respond to the EEBC without taking any concrete follow-up action: "we may respond, but not move."

NORMALIZATION TALKS MUST ACCOMPANY DEMARCATON

¶ 15. (C) Seyoum explained that public statements affirming Ethiopia's commitment to its previously announced five-point peace plan were necessitated by the erroneous announcement by UN SYG Annan's spokesman that the parties had agreed on demarcation without restrictions. "We will go to London, and we will continue to go to London, only if it is consistent with our five-point peace plan," Seyoum declared. He noted that demarcation should not be an end in itself, but rather a means toward achieving normalization of relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea: "We have said 'no demarcation' without normalization; (the 2000) Algiers (Accord) is for demarcation that will achieve a sustainable, durable peace." If the United States could guarantee that normalization talks would

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be held, "we will enter into talks on disputed areas," Seyoum said.

¶ 16. (C) DAS Yamamoto responded that the USG was committed to resolving the border issue to achieve sustainable peace, and sought to avoid "extra harm" or planting the seeds for future conflict. The March 10 EEBC meeting was successful, he said; the GOE's attendance had highlighted that Ethiopia did not wish to be an obstacle to demarcation. Yamamoto noted that the USG had held consultations with other UNSC members, to obtain financial commitments to support the peace process. While delimitation of the border was "over and finished," the United States hoped that the parties could work together on solutions that addressed potential problems arising from demarcation, such as the division of towns (highlighted by the simulated "flyover" presented by INR/GGI), and the anticipated displacement of an additional 58,000 border residents, adding to those already displaced and living in camps. Neither the United States nor other Witnesses to the 2000 Algiers Accords would spend funds unnecessarily for repatriation of additional displaced persons, if the issue could be avoided. Land and water rights also needed to be addressed as core issues, Yamamoto said. "Technical discussions" with General Carlton Fulford in the lead, who had been named by the EEBC, were needed to achieve sustainable peace. General Fulford would help both parties address these challenges of divided towns and displaced persons. Normalization talks would support the overall efforts to resolve the tensions between both parties and ensure a durable peace. The United States was willing to host normalization talks. Yamamoto cautioned, however, that the "goodwill of the United States is not limitless;" progress on demarcation was needed.

DEMARCATION WOULD DIVIDE VILLAGES

¶ 17. (C) Schofield noted that EEBC commissioners had viewed the virtual "flyover" of the Ethiopia-Eritrea border, which was the first time they had seen the impact of their 2002

decision. Gen. Fulford could play a useful role in helping the parties address the impact of demarcation, he added.

¶18. (C) INR/GGI Milefsky then presented the virtual "flyover" to FM Seyoum and other MFA officials, which included such areas as the Zela Ambesa-Altena road, the Ragali Delta/Danakil Depression, Tsorena, and the Badme Plain.

(NOTE: The flyover indicates that Badme lies 1.8 km from the line of demarcation, on the Eritrean side. END NOTE.)

Milesky highlighted that delimitation was a legal decision; whereas demarcation referred to the human implementation of that decision. In response, FM Seyoum expressed concern about "Point 9," indicating that the point of origin for the straight, western portion of the border needed to be moved even further west, to the confluence of two rivers, in accordance with the EEBC's decision. FM Seyoum also noted that some border villages that would be divided by demarcation (such as Sembel) were 400-500 years old.

¶19. (C) COMMENT: Foreign Minister Seyoum is a hardliner within the Ethiopian Government. He opposed Ethiopia's attendance at the March 10 London meeting, but relented to respond positively to U.S. engagement efforts. Seyoum has no trust in Eritrea, and fears that even with demarcation it is not clear that Eritrea will disarm, demobilize, and rehabilitate its large armed forces. Technical talks would address challenges from demarcation, but having normalization talks is the bottom line condition for Ethiopia's continued support for the demarcation process. Seyoum feels strongly that unless the causes of the conflict are addressed, there will never be any peace. Prime Minister Meles (reftel) shares many of these views. On the role of the United Nations Mission for Ethiopia-Eritrea (UNMEE), however, FM Seyoum is more outspoken that Ethiopian military leaders: in separate meetings (septel), Chief of General Staff Samora Yonus had praised UNMEE for helping defuse tensions, prevent minor misunderstandings from leading to larger conflict, and preserving the peace.

¶10. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: We have a long way to go before the demarcation process is completed, but for the first time the EEBC and the Witnesses see positive movement and want

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pressure maintained on both sides to ensure there is cooperation in implementing the EEBC decision. The road ahead for both parties and the facilitator, the United States, will be long and arduous. END COMMENT.

¶11. (U) DAS Yamamoto cleared this cable.
HUDDLESTON